

## [Stonecutter and Wife]

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STONECUTTER AND WIFE

"Yuh, I'm on the WPA now," Danli said.

"I guess you always will be," his wife said scornfully. "I guess you'll never get another decent job."

Danli shrugged his wide shoulders, his rugged dark face crinkled in a frown. "If there ain't any you can't get 'em," he said.

The little kitchen was clean under the light. A wood fire burned in the stove, and the smell of drying wood came from the oven. A picture of a cross hung over the oilcloth-covered table but it was purely ornamental. In the dimness of the living-room were pictures of movie actors — Mrs. Danli was a romanticist.

"We never be so bad off," she said. "I don't know what's going to become of us. When I was a girl I had everything I wanted. Then Dan always had swell jobs. My own girls had everything, too. They dressed better than any other girls in high school. They were better looking too, if I do say it. Now they're gone. They married swell guys both of them. But look at us here. We got nothing any more."

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"We'll have war," Danli said gravely. "About every twenty years for this country. From the end of one to the beginning of another. The Revolution — then 1812 — Mexico in '48 — the Civil War — in 1898 the Spanish-American — and the last one. About twenty years, see? The time is up. They coulda stopped Hitler last fall. Now... well, C.3 [???] 2 he'll take lots of stopping."

"Hitler!" Mrs. Danli said. "Mussolini too, that big bull! Two of a kind. Somebody ought to shoot them."

"Try it," Danli said, smiling.

"Me try it! Who am I to shoot them? Let a man do it. Let some big worthless hulk like you do it. If they kill you after, what difference it makes?"

"Shut up," Danli said. "Listen, I'm going on the road pretty quick again. I'm sick of your nagging. There's nothing for a man here."

"Are you a man that you can't even support your family? My, when I think of the things we used to have. My mother would die if she saw how we were now. My mother came from a good family. We came from Carrara, see? They're different than these other Italians. More delicate, more refined."

"The Vellis are from Carrara too," Dan observed.

"Montagna!" cried his wife in scorn. "From the mountains not the city. There's a difference. Just like between North and South Italy. Look at the Salvatores! Napolitani [trash?]. The map of Naples all over their faces."

"I'm Tuscani," Dan said.

His wife ignored him. "My mother was a dressmaker in the Old Country. She was awful smart. And you should see pictures when she was young. What stuff! My father was a

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[statue?]-cutter in Carrara. My mother used to walk by the place where he worked. All the men would whistle and say: 'Here comes your girl, Pietro.' My mother would not look up until 3 he whistled. She knew his from all the rest. My, he was a handsome man, blond with dark eyes. He died when he was only thirty-four.

"His family didn't want him to marry my mother. That's why they left there and came to this country. And it killed him, the granite. My mother never got over it."

"She married another quick enough."

"Sure, but did she love him? No! Not like my father, she didn't..."

Danli said: "I should have stayed down South. I was cutting stone down in Alberton, Georgia. The granite isn't so good and they don't pay so much, but there's work anyway. Steady work. The trouble is those crackers will work for nothing — and like it. Just like the Frenchmen they brought into Barre. You can't organize them either. I tried it. I tried to show them how the Union would increase their pay. They wouldn't listen. They're too scared — and stupid. But the work down there is steady and living is cheap. That's something, ain't it? In Barre living is expensive and the work is on and off. You only get half-a-year's work at the best.

"I'm a surface-cutter. I learned the trade under my father in this country. He came over first and sent back for me and my brothers. We couldn't speak a word of English. I don't know how we got train tickets or anything. My father had a small shed and he taught us to cut stone. If we'd all stuck together we might've built up a big company. Lots of 4 others did. But we didn't get along. Us boys was foolish. We could make more money cutting stone for somebody else so we left my father. We couldn't see ahead. So we made it and spent it. On clothes and booze and parties..."

"On women, you mean!" cut in his wife. "That's how you spent it."

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"Aw, I never went for women," Danli said. "Some of them did, but not me. I'd rather be with a gang of fellows, just sitting around drinking and talking. You know how it is."

"How about that big black widow Zorini?" demanded his wife.

"Her? That was nothing. It was her idea, wasn't it? But I didn't do nothing. I didn't want her, for chrissake. If I wanted women I could get better than that."

"You could, could you? Well let me tell you I could always get all the fellows I wanted, too. I —"

"Jesus Christ!" Dan said. "Shut up, will you? We want to talk. We aren't talking about women. Go play the piano or something."

Mrs. Danli went in the other room to play sketchily on the piano and sing popular love songs. "I can't play," she said. "But you should hear my daughter Nina play!" Dan waved her impatiently into oblivion with one big brown hand.

"We made money," he went on. "And we drifted around the country. You could always pick up a job in them days. I cut stone in Montreal, Concord, Quincy. I cut stone in 5 Hardwick an Barre. I worked the South, too. If you got sick of one place you could shove on to another. Always there was jobs. Look at Venture. He gets a Barre girl in trouble so he hits for the South. He gets another girl down there in trouble and lands back here. He marries the first one and beats it. Finally we hear he dies of syphilis. That's women for you. But not for me."

"My, but Dan is romantic," Mrs. Danli called. "When he was away this is the kind of letter he'd write: 'Dear Maria, Enclosed find check, Yours truly, Dan.'"

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Danli's dark lined cheeks crinkled deeper. "I knew that was all you was interested in," he said. "The check." He accepted and lit another cigarette. "I roll mine now," he said. "I'm getting to like them rolled. But tailormades taste good for a change...

"Now you can't get a job. Not around here. Maria wants me to go back to cutting stone. I'd do it if I could get a job. But not for long. I've had enough of that dust. I'm almost fifty. I never told anybody but I'm three-fourths filled up with silicosis. I know it. I don't talk about it. I don't think about it — much. But I know. What I want is a job with a construction company. Outdoors and all, bossing a gang of men. I know construction and I've handled men. I worked in the Holland Tunnel. I bossed a gang on the Fifteen-Mile Falls Dam. I had a gang of Vets on the Wrightsville job. If you can get work outa them punchdrunks you can get work outa anybody. And I did. 6 "I've had enough stonecutting. All the guys that started with me are dead — or to sick to work. Andreoli went last week. Cassandra is about done. Matthewson is in the [sanitorium?] — bad. They're all gone." Danli squinted through cigarette smoke. "I can't stand this WPA much more. Maria wants me to go back to the sheds. It looks like there's nothing much else. I don't like the idea. I know what she doesn't know. I know I shouldn't cut no more stone...

"But Jesus Christ," Danli said. "What's a man going to do? The girls are gone but I got a boy growing up. I ain't getting anywhere this way. The boy can't have half what he needs, no more than Maria can. And I can't even buy a glass of beer after the rent and groceries are paid.

"Yes," said Danli, slowly and gravely. "I'll go back to the sheds. I'll cut stone again — for awhile. If I can get a job."